



Transportation is an essential part of a modern life. Transportation connects people with their community and beyond. Effective transportation systems impact the quality of life and health for everyone. [1]

Yet, people with disabilities are often using a system that was not designed with them in mind. People with disabilities use the same transportation as people without disabilities, but people with disabilities use them at much lower rates. More than 70% of people with disabilities reduce daily travel because of their disability. [2] People with disabilities take fewer trips outside their home daily. When they do go out, they stay out for less time. [3]

Infrastructure designed without people with disabilities in mind can be dangerous. It increases the risk of accidents and missed appointments. Plus, without reliable transportation, people can easily become isolated. This can lead to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. [4] Lack of adequate transportation could result in people with developmental disabilities relying on a circle of support to meet their transportation needs, reducing independence and inclusion in the community. Insufficient transportation may also limit the choices of where people with developmental disabilities can live. The NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council believes that people with disabilities need and are entitled to safe, reliable, affordable and accessible transportation.

## Barriers to Transportation

### Physical Inaccessibility

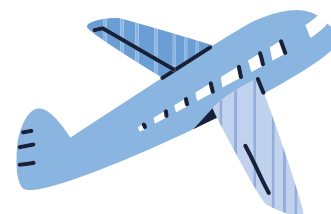
Perhaps the most obvious barrier to transportation is the ability to physically access it. One of the most common modes of travel for people with disabilities is walking or rolling. It is second only to personal vehicle use. [2] Maintained sidewalks with appropriate curb-cuts are important for all pedestrians, but they are especially important for people who use assistive devices. This includes wheelchairs, walkers or canes. Missing or poorly maintained curb-cuts can be dangerous. It can mean people are unable to get out of the road and back on the sidewalk. Weather conditions like snow only make it worse. People with disabilities often must take longer routes to ensure their safety if municipalities do not adequately remove snow or maintain the quality of their sidewalks.



Public transportation can also be inaccessible to people with disabilities. Trains and subways can be especially problematic for people with disabilities. Although progress is being made in this area, there is still a huge gap in access. In New York City, for example, only around 25% of MTA stations are wheelchair accessible. [5] Plus, in suburban or rural areas of the state, there are sometimes limited or no options for public transit at all. The public transportation schedules can also be reduced in the evenings or on weekends, limiting travel options for people with disabilities.

These issues extend to private and chartered travel as well. Ridesharing apps such as Uber and Lyft struggle to accommodate users with disabilities. They even struggle in areas where drivers are piloting wheelchair-accessible vehicles. In some cases, the rider won't know if their wheelchair will fit in the vehicle until the driver arrives, at which point, the driver will cancel the ride, and the customer will have to wait for another option or vehicle. [6]

Air travel is challenging for people with mobility issues, especially wheelchair users. Many planes and plane bathrooms are inaccessible to wheelchairs. Also, wheelchair users may need to check their wheelchairs at boarding. The wheelchairs are often lost or damaged in the process. Airlines damaged more than 18,000 wheelchairs in the first three and a half years that the Department of Transportation tracked that data. [7]



## Unreliable Services

No one likes to wait for a late bus or train, but for people with disabilities, the consequences of the wait can be more severe. Long waits are especially difficult for people with mobility issues. Many public bus stops have no benches or sitting shelters. As a result, a late bus isn't just a change of schedule. It can be a physical challenge for those standing longer than expected.

Paratransit refers to services that supplement larger public transit systems. Arriving and traveling on-time is one of the biggest challenges in paratransit. [8] People with disabilities schedule paratransit in a 1-hour window. For example, if a person is using paratransit to go to a doctor's appointment at 3:00pm, they schedule transit for 2:00-3:00. This means even when rides are "on-time," a person may still arrive an hour early and wait. Worse still, paratransit is not always on-time. This results in things like missed appointments and late arrivals to work. Sometimes, arranged transit comes too early and then leaves when the person isn't there to board right away. In addition, some paratransit companies will not travel between counties.

## Cost

The cost of transportation is a major barrier for the disability community. More than half of people with disabilities, ages 18 to 64, live in a household with annual household income under \$25,000. Compare this to 15 percent of people without disabilities. [2] People with travel-limiting disabilities are often eligible for reduced-price or Medicaid covered options. Yet, cost remains a barrier to many. There are also cost barriers for ridesharing apps like Uber or Lyft. These services need both a smart phone and a credit card. Each of these two requirements can be another financial barrier for people with disabilities.

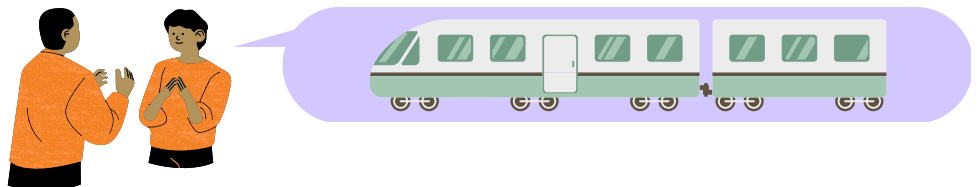
Personal vehicle travel is the top mode of transport, regardless of disability status. Using a personal vehicle prevents many issues of reliability and wait times, especially in rural areas where people often have to travel longer distances. However, this option is not available to many low-income individuals. The cost of getting, maintaining and in some cases, modifying the vehicle for use is high. A new vehicle modified for a driver with disabilities can cost anywhere between \$20,000 to \$80,000. [9] Some people with disabilities are unable to safely drive a car, so finding and paying a driver can be an additional financial barrier.

## Attitudinal Barriers and Biases

Bus and commercial drivers often lack the skills and knowledge needed to effectively assist passengers. People with disabilities report drivers refusing rides and charging inappropriate cleaning fees. Some bus drivers pass scheduled stops because they don't know how to secure wheelchairs. Rideshare drivers often don't understand the rights of riders with disabilities. For example, many don't know it is illegal to refuse a ride to an individual with a service animal. [6] Driver mistakes put the burden of education on the person with the disability.

Unfortunately, attitudinal barriers extend beyond transportation professionals. Even the friends and families of people with disabilities have bias. Many mistakenly believe their loved one can't learn and use public transportation options. People with disabilities learn about community transportation mostly through family, friends and colleagues. [10] If they don't think public transit is an option, they are not likely sharing information. Often people with disabilities don't know their own right to accessible transportation.

In addition, people with developmental disabilities can feel unsafe on public transportation as they may be a target for bullying and fraud by other members of the public.



# Policy Recommendations

## Invest in Infrastructure and Explore New Ways to Fund Transportation

To empower all people to explore their communities, investments must be made in strong infrastructure. Curb-cuts, accessible signals, ramps and accessible stops and stations build inclusive communities. Access and accommodations need to improve across all modes of transportation, from walking to flying.

Reliable transportation can be expensive for people with disabilities, even though some transportation is covered through government funding like Medicaid. As an alternative, the state could provide reimbursement or funding to allow people with developmental disabilities to pay friends, family members or neighbors for rides.

## Educate Transit and Paratransit Professionals

Increased education and training are necessary for professionals across all modes of transportation. Education should include giving respect and dignity to people with disabilities, as well as practical, hands-on training in passenger assistance. All drivers, conductors and attendants should know the laws around access. This includes the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA). Airport personnel should learn to safely handle wheelchairs and other assistive devices. Anyone handling baggage should know the risks people face with lost or damaged equipment.

## Train People with Disabilities and Their Families and Caregivers

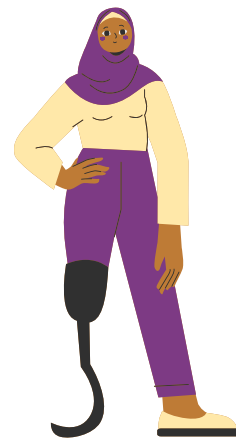
People with disabilities and their families need to understand their rights. This will help them better advocate for themselves. More people with disabilities can find their independence using public transportation. Travel training and wayfinding can help people with various disabilities navigate their communities. Most people learn about transportation by talking to people they know. [10] Education should target people with disabilities, local organizations, non-profits with existing connections and family members or caregivers. This might also include parent-groups or community centers. Information should be available in accessible language and in languages other than English.

In addition, safety training on topics like self-protection, being alert of surroundings, how to get help and how to report an incident of bullying or fraud on public transportation could help people with developmental disabilities feel more safe. The use of whistles and group travel can further improve safety when traveling.



## Include People with Disabilities in the Conversation

People with disabilities need to be involved in the planning and creation of new transit systems and policies. There has been promising movement in this direction. The “Complete Streets” bill, which Governor Hochul signed in December of 2022, is a good example. This legislation requires various New York transit authorities to update their boards. Boards must have a voting member who uses public transit as their primary mode of transportation, including people with disabilities. [11] Any discussion of transportation challenges related to having a disability should include people with developmental disabilities experiencing these challenges. Intentional inclusion of people with developmental disabilities improves systems from the ground up.



## Streamline Access

Steps can and should be taken to streamline access to all modes of transportation. In Pennsylvania, agencies worked together to create a tool called FindMyRidePA (FMR). This tool combines the application process for several transportation assistance programs. FMR makes it easier for people to access and understand programs. They don't need to know different eligibility requirements to apply. Collaboration between transit and human services agencies reduce barriers for transportation.

Advocates also recommend working with rideshare companies to increase payment options, improve accessibility and streamline funding with other travel-related services such as medical transportation. [6]

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[1] (2010) CDC Recommendations for Improving Health through Transportation Policy

<https://www.cdc.gov/transportation/docs/FINAL-CDC-Transportation-Recommendations-4-28-2010.pdf>

[2] Brumbaugh, S. (2018) Travel patterns of American adults with disabilities, Travel Patterns of American Adults with Disabilities | Bureau of Transportation Statistics. US Dept of Transportation. Available at: <https://www.bts.gov/travel-patterns-with-disabilities> (Accessed: January 25, 2023).

[3] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2017 National Household Travel Survey. URL: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>.

[4] Brown V, Morgan T, Fralick A. Isolation and mental health: thinking outside the box. Gen Psychiatr. 2021 May 24;34(3):e100461. doi: 10.1136/gpsych-2020-100461. PMID: 34131627; PMCID: PMC8149428.

[5] (Jan 2023) MTA Accessible Stations by Borough. <https://new.mta.info/document/25961>

[6] (2019) New York State Transportation Network Company Accessibility Task Force: Final Report & Recommendations.

[7] (2022) Disability Priorities for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

[8] On-Time Performance in ADA Paratransit. Topic Guide 6. Funded by the Federal Transit Administration. <https://dredf.org/ADAtg/OTP.pdf>

[9] The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Road Safety, Adapted Vehicles. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/adapted-vehicles>

[10] Transportation Needs Assessment of Diverse Older Adults, Younger Adults with Disabilities and Caregivers. National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC)

[11] New York Legislation (S.3897/A.8936-A)